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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 22, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MORE PROTECTIVE FOODS AS INCOME RISES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Bulletin available, 1757-F, "Diets to Fit the Family Income."

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Most of us like to check our ways against those of other people similar to ourselves. Whether we're interested in food habits or money expenditures we like to find a convenient yardstick by which to measure our own results.

I found a very good yardstick of this kind the other day, in a report of some studies of food consumption, by Dr. Hazel E. Stiebeling of the Bureau of Home Economics. More than a thousand individual family records collected since 1914 were analyzed to show the kind, quantity, and cost of the food used by a number of different sorts of people. Families of business men, professional workers, and low-income, semi-dependent people were included. The records were taken in every season of the year, in cities and villages in 44 States and the District of Columbia. More records were secured in the northeastern section of the country than elsewhere, however.

The points that interested me were these: What kinds of food predominate in the American diet? How do my food expenditures -- or yours -- compare with what other people spend? Could one get information on how to be sure of the best food value for what one had to spend?

The free bulletin, which I have mentioned before, called "Diets to Fit the Family Income," will help on the last question. Dr. Stiebeling's analysis of the dietary studies I just spoke of throws some light on the others.

You may be surprised to know that as a nation, Americans have apparently eaten about the same total quantity of food for the past ten years. In spite of the depression there seems to have been no marked decrease in the volume of food produced and disappearing into the channels of trade. Food prices seem to have been adjusted to what consumers could pay.

Dr. Stiebeling points out, however, that while some groups of the population enjoy a very liberal supply of food, and help maintain a high national average, there are a large number who are not benefited by the foods available. These families may not get enough food, or enough variety for health and efficiency.

It isn't just a question of pounds bought, although Dr. Stiebeling has tables to show that the families spending the most for food bought three times as much food as those spending the least. When people have more money to spend, they buy more food. Better food. Greater variety. More of the higher priced kinds. They often waste more, too, in preparation, not having to cut corners so closely.

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These increases in food purchases are not evenly distributed through all the different kinds of food. With more to spend, families buy much more eggs, meat, milk, butter, succulent vegetables, and fruits. These foods enrich the diet in high-quality protein, or minerals and vitamins. The increases are much less pronounced in grain products, although these may cost more because more of the ready-prepared kinds are purchased. There is only a small increase in consumption of potatoes, dried legumes, and fats other than butter.

When you compare families that can spend from \$258 to \$290 per person per year for food, with those who spend only \$32 to \$65 a year per person, you find that the former use three times as much milk and lean meats as the low-income group, five times as much fruit and vegetables, butter, and eggs. Vegetables here do not include potatoes. They fall in another group.

As you follow the food consumption records for families in ten different spending groups, you see that as more is spent for food, they buy a larger proportion of their fat in the form of butter, and more milk in fresh fluid form, rather than canned. They buy more tomatoes, oranges, and leafy, green, or yellow-colored vegetables -- the vitamin-rich foods. These purchases vary not only from one level of expenditure to another but also from region to region and from season to season. In other words, where you live makes some difference in diet, also what you can get and what is locally grown.

For instance, the total consumption of fats in the East South Central region is conspicuously high, but the consumption of butter tends to be low. In the South and also in the Pacific region people seem to eat a great deal of fat or fatty foods and less than the average amount of lean meat. Either fat or meat seems to be required to give a sense of satisfaction to the American consumer.

As one would expect, families living in the South and in California have an abundant supply of vegetables and fruits at relatively low prices most of the year. A good part of those eaten in the Pacific region belong to the group noted for special nutritive values -- tomatoes, citrus fruits, leafy green, and yellow vegetables.

Would you like to know how your own food buying habits measure up on the yardstick?

Well, about two-thirds of the families who spent less than \$97 per capita per year for food (1935 price levels) had diets that failed to meet average minimum requirements in one or more respects. The next higher group had an uncertain margin of safety. About half the families studied spent from \$161 to \$290 per person per year for food and could obtain fully adequate diets if care were taken in the selection and preparation of food. Almost all families that spent from \$193 to \$226 per capita per year had diets that met average minimum requirements. But even these generous food budgets did not always provide safety in every essential for good nutrition.

So if you want to be sure that your food purchases, at whatever level they may be, give your family the best possible proportion of high quality proteins, minerals and vitamins, and the right ratio of other necessary foods, send to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for the free Farmers' Bulletin, 1757-F, "Diets to Fit the Family Income." Dr. Stiebeling is one of the authors of this bulletin. Mrs. Rowena S. Carpenter is the other.

